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FM AMEMBASSY TOKYO  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8246  
INFO RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 4855  
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PRIORITY 1339  
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL PRIORITY 0965  
RUEHFK/AMCONSUL FUKUOKA PRIORITY 8781  
RUEHNH/AMCONSUL NAHA PRIORITY 1292  
RUEHOK/AMCONSUL OSAKA KOBE PRIORITY 2186  
RUEHKSO/AMCONSUL SAPPORO PRIORITY 9831  
RUEHSH/AMCONSUL SHENYANG PRIORITY 0397  
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEHIN/AIT TAIPEI PRIORITY 6204  
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY  
RHMFISS/COMUSJAPAN YOKOTA AB JA PRIORITY  
RUAGAAA/COMUSKOREA SEOUL KOR PRIORITY  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TOKYO 006493

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TAGS: PREL KPAO PHUM JA KN KS

SUBJECT: JAPAN TELECOM MINISTER ORDERS NHK INTERNATIONAL  
ABDUCTION BROADCASTS

REF: A. OSC JPP2006111023002  
    1B. OSC JPP20061109043011  
    1C. OSC JPP2006111023006

Classified By: Ambassador J.Thomas Schieffer. Reasons 1.4 (B) (D)

¶1. (C) Summary. On November 10, Minister Internal Affairs and Communications (MIC) Suga issued a controversial order requiring the international arm of NHK, Japan's public broadcasting company, to transmit reports on North Korea's abduction of Japanese nationals. NHK officials insisted that the MIC mandate would not affect the editorial content of network programs. Major Japanese media outlets have criticized the MIC order as "disturbing" and "setting a dangerous precedent." Separately, the Investigation Commission on Missing Japanese Probably Related to North Korea (COMJAN), which privately transmits its own abduction-related broadcasts, suggested that the government order did not go far enough. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Minister Internal Affairs and Communications (MIC) Yoshihide Suga on November 10 ordered the international arm of NHK, Japan's public broadcasting company, to transmit short-wave reports on North Korea's abduction of Japanese nationals (ref a). Japan Radio Regulatory Council (RGC), a panel that advises the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (MIC), had endorsed MIC Minister Yoshihide Suga's controversial proposal the previous day. Though Japan's Broadcasting Law permits the government to "order NHK to conduct international broadcasting by designating areas of broadcasting, matters for broadcasting and other necessary matters," this was the first time that Tokyo authorities had instructed NHK to produce stories on a specific topic. The government annually provides 2.2 billion yen (USD 18.76 million) in subsidies to NHK. The network receives 6 billion yen (USD 51.16 million) from viewer subscriptions. (Note: Households that receive NHK are, by law, required to pay monthly subscriptions. In recent years, however, a growing number of households have refused to pay, seriously affecting NHK's income stream.)

¶3. Minister Suga's order to NHK immediately drew criticism in all major print media and broadcasters. Suga's move was termed, variously, "disturbing" and "a dangerous precedent." (ref b) Suga assured reporters that MIC would not interfere

in program content and that similar orders would not be issued to private broadcasters. Chief Cabinet Secretary Shiozaki, tacitly recognizing flaws in the broadcast law that allows such "guidance," suggested that the controversy might provide a good opportunity to start debate on this "rather old law" (ref c).

¶4. (C) Minister Suga, a close political ally of Prime Minister Abe who earned the prime minister's trust by taking tough stands on DPRK issues, was promoted to the MIC minister job after serving as the Senior Vice Minister at MIC. Suga's order faced initial opposition from LDP officials who believed that the edict would be perceived as being too confrontational, according to MIC Satellite Broadcasting Division Assistant Director Shouji Yukinaga. Initially, "voices within the ministry" urged caution because of fear that the order might draw criticism from the public (for interfering in NHK's editorial policies), but these voices quickly disappeared after the Abe Administration "empathetically stressed the importance of resolving the abduction issue," he explained.

¶5. (C) NHK International Public Affairs spokesman Toshiaki Suda maintained that the MIC mandate will not affect the editorial content of network's programs. However, some media analysts criticized NHK for not taking a stronger stand against the MIC order. They suggested that NHK might have downplayed the issue out of concern over a pending MIC review of NHK finances. MIC is examining whether to revise the Broadcasting Law to strengthen the collection mechanism for the NHK subscription fees. Analysts suggested that NHK may not have wanted to jeopardize the potential new revenue from

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subscription fees by angering ministry.

Private Broadcast Group: Mixed Reaction

¶6. (C) The Investigation Commission on Missing Japanese Probably Related to North Korea (COMJAN), which conducts the short-wave radio broadcast "Shiokaze" ("Sea Breeze") to North Korea from its Tokyo headquarters using an transmitter located in Taiwan, indicated that the government regulation may not go far enough. "Shiokaze" focuses exclusively on gathering information on people suspected of being abducted by the DPRK and broadcasts into North Korea seeking new information. COMJAN representative Kazuhiro Araki told Embassy Tokyo Political Officer that "even though the government will order NHK to begin broadcast reports on the abduction issue, the authorities will not dictate the content of the material, or mandate that programs be broadcast during certain times of the day."

¶7. (C) Separately, Kyodo news service quoted Araki as saying that Tokyo officials should: 1) mandate that abduction programs be broadcast at certain times every day, and 2) have the government produce its own program using its own broadcaster. COMJAN, Araki said, will recommend that the government utilize NHK facilities to investigate and/or locate victims of abduction. At the same time, however, COMJAN broadcaster Kenji Murao expressed concern that public might mistakenly think that NHK will now provide financial support for "Shiokaze," whose focus is on gathering information, which could lead to reduced private contributions.

SCHIEFFER